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Controversial Issues in Adventure Education

Should Challenge Course Instructors Be Certified?

YES

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It is the position of this article that Challenge Course Instructors should be required to comply with a professional certification process. Whereas various types of certification already exist in most viable professional arenas, the real question is perhaps not "should challenge course instructors be certified?", rather "are challenge course Instructors viable professionals?" For the context of this article, the assumption has been made that challenge course services are in fact, very professional in nature. This is seen through the thousands of individuals, organizations, and institutions that financially support themselves through the daily provision of challenge course services. As with most professional venues however, the quality and safety management of the challenge course experience is driven by the skill and ability of the practitioner leading the activity. The appropriate point of discussion, therefore, should not revolve around whether certification is needed, rather, what should certification consist of.

In defining a method and a purpose supporting certification as it relates to the challenge course field, it is necessary to look at

the training practices of other Adventure Education disciplines. The existence of certification within a professional practice brings with it the implication of quality, accountability, and order. Levels of certification and licensure within the recreation and adventure fields vary depending on the nature of the activity. All levels of certification, however, typically endorse appropriate standards of practice through a format that is both discipline and milieu specific. A credible certification process is designed to endorse a specific scope of practice as it pertains to perimeters and privileges. Safety guidelines, ethical perspectives, and an outline for quality management procedures are all addressed in viable certification.

The criteria used to outline reputable certification procedures in most cases are written and sanctioned by a professional standard setting organization. For example, the American Canoe Association (ACA) prescribes a certification process for canoeing instructors. This does not mean that one must be certified to teach canoeing skills, but it is well recognized that an ACA certified canoe instructor has gone through a rigorous evaluative

process and has a quality endorsement. Other examples include the following: Certified scuba instructors must hold a valid and current instructors card from one of five certifying agencies (i.e. SSI, NASDS, PADA, NAUI, YMCA) to instruct novices and acquire necessary liability insurance, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) are certified by a competent medical authority (i.e. Red Cross, American Heart Association, etc.) and must follow specific protocol without deviation, the American Mountain Guides Alliance (AMGA) certifies mountaineering guides, American Camping Association (ACA) certifies for standards of excellence in camping programs, Hunter Education Certification is required in most states to acquire a hunting license for youth and adults, Water Safety Instruction Certification (WSI) is typically required to be a life guard, and National Ski Instructor Certification is required to be a Ski Patrol. These are just a few examples of recreation and adventure venues that successfully implement reputable certification programs. In reviewing these programs it is important to note the common goals they share. These goals embody a commitment to provide state-of-the-art excellence through a set of procedures that are comprehensive, measurable in content, fairly administered, and modeled in accordance with current national operational standards. The challenge course industry, as well as any discipline, would benefit from embracing this commitment.

In considering the need for technical certification in the challenge course industry or for that matter any recreational activity, a clear definition must be established which addresses the notion of risk in measurable terms. It is not enough for instructors to be able to define the differences between *low risk* and *high risk* as they pertain to potential consequences, they should also be able to iden-

tify when *low risk becomes high risk*. Only by this identification can reasonable, educated decisions be made addressing the need for certification.

In examining the need for certification it is necessary to note the relationship between "required expertise" and "level of risk". When considering the many activities commonly associated with the field of Adventure Education, remember that viable certification processes are discipline specific. Although risk is present to some degree in all that we do, some activities are obviously more technically intensive than others are. Therefore the need to certify must be based on 1) the level of technical skills required for safe participation, and 2) the potential consequences of improper execution. In short, the greater the possible risk, the more important it is to have instructor certification.

For example, mild terrain hiking is a relatively low risk involvement that brings with it a different set of possible circumstances than class three white water canoeing. Whereas certification may not be appropriate for hiking, it is a common and wise practice in white water canoeing. The simple reason for this is that navigating a canoe in class three white water is a skill driven sport where the lack of knowledge or competence could result in a fatal consequence. A similar comparison might be the sport of fishing in contrast to challenge course participation. Both activities are challenging outdoor endeavors that require expertise, skill, and knowledge for successful execution. Indeed, the potential for professional opportunity exists for both involvements as well. The typical risk factors associated with the two, however, are very different. Though fishing is not by any means risk free, the need for "fishing certification" has not yet shown itself to be necessary. Challenge course

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instruction, however, brings with it a high level of risk as defined by the dangerous and potentially fatal consequences that could arise from either misjudgment or incompetence. The very nature of challenge course instruction requires the proficient use of "life lines or belay lines" to prevent the occurrence of a serious fall. Consequently, there is a definite need for challenge course instructor certification as it relates to the level of risk.

Another area that needs to be addressed is interpersonal dynamics or "soft skills" as they relate to challenge course certification. Contrary to technical skills that are procedurally consistent and measurable, soft skills are not so clearly defined. For example, the procedure for attaching a climber to a rope can be addressed in a common language that guarantees identical protocol for each participant. On the other hand, the instructor's interpersonal skills may greatly effect the quality of the participant's challenge course experience. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the certification process to address "soft skills" through an educational format that is based on awareness rather than prescribed protocol. Certification must establish clear guidelines and expectations that instructors have the ability to interact and work with people in a skillful, purposeful, and dignified manner. This process however, is more than the simple recognition of an individual's inherent ability to comfortably interact with people. It also acknowledges that the best any professional can do is work within his/her boundaries and seek professional support when needed. Many challenge course programs cater to a diverse cross section of the population. It is not unusual for a program to provide adventure education services to young children on Monday, adults on Tuesday, individuals with behavioral problems on Wednesday, etc. Cer-

tification therefore should require challenge course instructors to work within their professional capacity to provide a level of quality and care equal to the demands and expectations of the group.

Utilizing specialized professional resources is a common practice in most human service work. For example, teachers are licensed to provide specified educational experiences to students, and do not ordinarily work outside their area or level of training. Consequently if a student is tested and found to be Learning Disabled (LD), a referral is made to the special education department. If the special education department finds issues with alcohol or chemical dependency, a referral is made to the appropriate counselor and the list could continue based upon the specific circumstances of the child. Likewise, challenge course certification does not imply that instructors are licensed to work with the special needs of cancer recovery patients, or children with Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), or persons with disabilities, or corporate managers, etc. It does imply however, that challenge course instructors 1) have the technical expertise and interpersonal skills necessary to provide a variety of purposeful challenge course experiences to many different groups of people, and 2) honor and respect the many licensures and accreditations that exist for special population focus.

In practical application, "soft skill" aptitude virtually insures or eliminates professional tenure in human service venues. Individuals are typically not eliminated from becoming challenge course instructors through the certification process itself. Rather, in most instances it evolves through the process of 1) natural selection, and/or 2) professional development. Natural selection simply implies that individuals with good

"people skills" tend to do well in "people related" professions. The opposite holds true as well. For example, a short career is most likely inevitable for the certified challenge course instructor or the licensed MD Family Practitioner who cannot get along, or work effectively with people. Certified or not certified, challenge course instructors are governed by the same code of reason as all human service professionals. *Professional development* suggests that regardless of the occupation, ultimately, all viable professionals are part of, and governed by, a larger system. Although these systems are situation-specific, they share commonalities including: 1.) methods for assessment (i.e. evaluations, internships, apprenticeships, etc.), and 2.) a means of controlling the quality and mission of the profession/occupation (i.e. supervision). For example, a certified challenge course instructor who works for a public school system must abide by the policies and procedures of the school district, assuming the guidelines are reasonable, fair in content, and in accordance with challenge course standards. Another example might be a Licensed Psychologist whose practice is ultimately monitored by the school, business, or corporation that employs him or her.

In summary, we believe that challenge course certification is a necessary condition for the evolution and continued professional growth of the field. It is our contention that a reasonable argument cannot be made in opposition to a certification process that is comprehensive, measurable in content, fairly administered, and modeled in accordance with current national standards. We did not outline specifics of the challenge course certification process such as: cost information, time allocations, vendor selection, etc., rather, we argued that challenge course instructors are legitimate professionals who work in a viable

occupation, and that certification is required for professional advancement, recognition, and acceptance. In short, the development of challenge course certification demands that appropriate and accountable procedures be defined, not through perspectives of relativity, but through solid criteria that represent the industry its intent, purpose, and plan.

The following question and answer format is presented to assist individuals and programs with basic questions they may currently have regarding training and/or certification.

1. What does certification currently mean?

Challenge course instructor certification means that an individual has been taught and tested in accordance with documented policies, procedures, and standards endorsed by the individual or company administering the certification. It also implies that a "certification document" or "written endorsement" is provided to persons who successfully complete the course. This certificate verifies that specific information and skills were taught and that competency and understanding was demonstrated. It should be noted that although third party professional certification from a professionally endorsed company is typically the best choice, internal certifications can be designed and administered in an effective manner. Serious questions, however, need to be discussed when doing internal certifications concerning state of the art quality and liability considerations.

2. Who is setting the standards for the industry?

The standard setting body for challenge course programs is the ACCT (Association of Challenge Course

Technology). ACCT is a national trade association organized for the purpose of setting challenge course industry standards. ACCT originated in 1988 as a group of challenge course providers who came together to informally discuss safe practices in the construction of challenge courses. To date, ACCT has evolved into a highly respected trade association credited with the publication of national industry standards for both *challenge course installation and technical operations*. With an active membership of over 1000 practitioners, ACCT provides professional vendor endorsement to both small and large companies, ongoing research and development for materials and construction procedures, and networking and resource opportunities of the highest quality. All minimum technical criteria required for challenge course instructor certification is clearly presented in the ACCT Standards Manual.

3. What are they certifying?

Challenge course certification provides a) a process by which participants are taught and tested, and b) an endorsement by the certifying agent. The process for certification obviously varies depending on the instructor. The general format, however, should include

descriptive interpretations of standards allowing for and encouraging site specific application. Protocol for policies and procedures, practical and written testing, discussion of liability considerations, emergency planning and rescue, equipment care, course management, practical skill testing, etc. should all be covered in the certification process. Endorsement of this process is the verification of successful completion.

4. Who is conducting the certification and what are their qualifications?

It is strongly recommended that a good amount of time and energy be put into choosing a challenge course certification vendor. Unfortunately there are many individuals in the field who claim unsubstantiated expertise in the challenge course "training" arena. Few, however, provide quality certification training. Be wary of the self-endorsed professional who claims that challenge course trainers should not certify. Certification by a quality professional implies that the training entity is confident in their ability to provide a comprehensive curriculum that is measurable, and in accordance with ACCT Operational Standards.

Should Challenge Course Instructors Be Certified?

NO

Simon Priest, Ph.D.

By NO, I really mean YES, if we are talking about certifying the "hard skills" of challenge course instruction. Otherwise, if the certificate encompasses any other competencies of challenge course instruction (such as "soft skills" or "meta skills"), I emphatically stand opposed to that certification in any form. My opposition is founded upon the following reasons:

1. soft and meta skills are difficult (sometimes impossible) to measure, train or assess;
2. testing quality is often poor and minimal (frequently excludes soft and meta skills);
3. certification has everybody doing things the same way, at the expense of creativity;
4. university programs fill the void better, but are impacted by politics and finances;
5. certification can exclude highly experienced and very capable non-certified people;
6. certification does not protect practitioners from litigation or maintain consumer safety;

7. for these and other reasons, some of the best certification schemes no longer certify;
8. practitioners in the field prefer program accreditation to leader certification; and
9. experts in the field have historically agreed on certifying technicians, not leaders.

However, before we investigate these reasons further, I think some clarification around the use and definition of terms is warranted. We need to know the denotation and connotation of words like outdoor leader, challenge course instructor, certification, skills and competence.

DEFINITIONS

An **outdoor leader** is a person who takes others into natural settings or guides them through adventurous experiences for the purposes of changing the way they feel, think, and/or behave in relationships (with themselves, others and nature). In these roles, the outdoor leader holds a subtle combina-

tion of legal and moral responsibility for client learning, group supervision, individual safety, and environmental protection (Priest & Gass, 1997).

The challenge course instructor is simply a narrower subset of the outdoor leader, because the former works only with challenge courses and not in other settings such as wilderness for the latter. A challenge course is an artificially constructed series of difficult and/or challenging "elements" strung between trees and/or poles and composed of plastic, metal, wood, wire and rope. A client negotiates high elements with a safety line (belay) and low elements with group support (spotting). Early challenge courses were built from rope and thus called ropes courses.

Certification has been defined by literature in our field as a process that guarantees that minimum standards of competency have been met or exceeded as evaluated by a certifying agency following a period of leadership preparation (Senosk, 1977). According to Ewert (1985), certification is "a means to assure that only qualified people may systematically engage in the formal teaching and/or leading of individuals in the outdoor adventure situation" (p.17).

These two authorities have used a mix of carefully chosen words like "guarantee minimum standards of competency" or "assure...qualified...teaching and leading" in their definitions. From this usage, we can interpret their meaning and reason with little argument: *a certified challenge course instructor is a person who is certain to have passed a test of minimum competence and who is thus qualified to teach or lead clients in various aspects of a challenge course.*

Before we can certify someone to be a qualified challenge course instructor, we must agree upon the skills necessary to in-

struct a challenge course experience. Fortunately, members of our field have done this through research studies on outdoor leadership and challenge course competence. From the generic research on outdoor leadership, conducted in the 1980s, the adventure programming field is clear about the skills areas necessary to be an effective outdoor leader (Priest & Gass, 1997):

Hard Skills	Meta Skills
technical skills	problem solving skills
safety skills	decision making skills
environmental skills	experience-based judgement
	flexible leadership style
Soft Skills	communication and ethics
organizational skills	A Foundation of personable
instructional skills	traits and professional
facilitation skills	knowledge

In comparison, **hard skills** tend to be solid, tangible, measurable, and easy to train and assess; while **soft skills** tend to be amorphous, intangible, difficult to measure, and tough to train or assess. **Meta skills** are higher order core abilities which serve to integrate the hard and soft skills and bind them together in a workable synergy. Consider the illustration of building a brick wall atop a cement foundation (of past learning and personality held by the leader). Hard and soft skills are bricks in the wall. Meta skills are mortar holding those bricks together, thus strengthening the wall of outdoor leadership (Priest & Gass, 1997).

From specific studies on challenge course competence, conducted in the early 1990s, the field of adventure programming seems to be in reasonable consensus about the competencies needed to be a challenge course instructor (Priest, 1995):

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Technical (hard) Skills

belaying and spotting techniques
accessing and egressing the course
tying knots and conducting self-transfers
clipping-in or tying-in to harnesses
dressing clients in correct equipment
using specialized equipment
supervising clients in self-transfer/belay
inspecting trees/poles and hardware/software
encouraging clients to stretch and warm-up
knowing construction standards
selecting activity to suit client needs
delivering activity with correct introduction
sequencing activities in appropriate order
picking appropriate props and equipment
setting up/taking down facility components
performing first aid and CPR
carrying out accident response procedures
rescuing/removing a stuck/injured client
identifying negative weather patterns
noticing and avoiding dangers
communicating with effective commands
curtailing dangerous client behavior
reducing damage to the local surroundings
orienting clients to specific safety issues
establishing safety/risk management
screening legal and medical forms
caring for equipment and facility resources
knowing relevant learning theories
managing and supervising staff
writing policies or plans for staff
diagnosing client needs or goals
designing program content and format
planning logistics (food, transport, etc.)

Facilitation (soft) Skills

Recreational (changing feelings)

instructing clients in technical skills
monitoring client challenge by choice
mediating client infractions of activity "rules"
contracting clients for acceptable behavior
observing group dynamics and performance
identifying critical incidents to talk about
having previously participated in the course
determining client readiness to engage

Educational (changing thinking)

debriefing and alternative reflection methods
funneling (sequence questions in discussion)
direct frontloading techniques
assisting clients to set SMART goals
encouraging metaphor sharing

Developmental (changing behaviors)

isomorphic framing techniques
enhancing transfer techniques
helping clients commit to change
action planning or pledging SMART goals
following-up to check adherence

Therapeutic (changing mal-behaviors)

indirect frontloading (paradox/double binds)
safeguarding client emotions
making decisions within competence limit
exhibiting professional ethical standards
intervening against dysfunctional actions

Once again, we see the familiar division of hard and soft competencies. The hard ones are needed for the challenge course instructor to be an effective technician. The soft ones are needed for the instructor to be an effective facilitator. In addition, the facilitator list is divided into four categories which indicate the depth of adventure programming conducted by the instructor.

A **recreational** adventure program changes the way people feel through enjoyment, entertainment or teaching technical skills. An **educational** adventure program changes the way people think through generating enrichment, teaching concepts or creating awareness. A **developmental** adventure program changes the way people behave by increasing function and positive actions. A **therapeutic** adventure program changes the way people "mal-behave" by decreasing dysfunction and negative actions (Priest, 1995).

The instructor working in a recreational program needs the technical competencies listed and only those from the first part of the facilitation list. The educational program instructor needs all that (technical list plus recreation part) and the educational part of facilitation. In a developmental program, the instructor needs all the technical and all parts of the facilitation lists, except the therapeutic piece. The adventure therapy challenge course instructor needs everything listed.

Although many of the terms used in these lists may not be familiar to all readers, the two key points here are that the division of hard and soft skills is universal throughout outdoor leadership or adventure programming, and that more complex or sophisticated types of adventure programs demand increasing levels of facilitation competence from instructors.

With a clearer understanding of definitions and competencies, we can now turn our

attention to the nine reasons on which my opposition to certification is based. These are presented in the order they were first summarized.

Measurement

Soft and meta skills are difficult (sometimes impossible) to measure, train or assess. Working with people (almost all of the soft skills) and reasoning in challenging situations (most of the meta skills) are highly subjective. The field cannot agree upon what the best practices are in each of these cases. Leaders develop these skills by varied means. Humans exhibit these skills differently under different conditions and circumstances. Experts even disagree on what the terms mean.

As a result of the variability listed above, one cannot validly or reliably determine a leader's judgement or compassion. Simply put we cannot measure these parts of the equation. So we are left with two choices: either leave them out (concentrate on hard skills only) or ignore them (and hope they aren't critical)!

My fear with challenge course instructors is that both scenarios are taking place. As with all early forms of outdoor leadership certification, ignorance was bliss and schemes simply measured the tangibles such as ability to do an activity, do it safely and sometimes do it without damaging the environment. These approaches chose to avoid dealing with teaching, or organizing, or facilitating and would never have ventured onto the higher meta plane of judgement, ethics, communication or leadership styles.

The easy way out for administrators is to control for safety and use this as a way to avoid accidents. Many people believe that this will be enough and are not concerned with the quality of the participant's experience or

whether that person was traumatized because of unethical coercion or lack of psychological safety procedures. If we only consider the hard pieces of the puzzle, we will never complete the bigger picture of delivering top quality challenge course experiences.

Testing Quality

While writing this chapter, I had just retired and moved to a new state, where I was forced to get a local driving license: **become certified to operate a motor vehicle**. Certification consisted of completing three portions of the examination: an eye test, a written (computerized) multiple choice test, and a driving test.

The eye test consisted of looking into a monitor and reading one line of finely printed eight letters (visual acuity), naming four colours (color blindness), and describing the location of a dot inside or outside a box (depth perception). The answers I provided (all correct) were gleaned from conducting the test with my glasses on, but were also the same answers I had overheard given by applicants lined up in front of me. I could have easily memorized and regurgitated their responses.

I performed the written test of rules and standards, **without** reading the manual, got 5 wrong out of 25, and still managed to pass this portion of my certificate examination! The questions I got wrong had little to do with driving a car and were about subjects like "deadlines for registering the sale of a motor vehicle" and "what kind of identification was acceptable to apply for a license" (a step I had already completed).

When I reported to the window clerk, she asked me how I found the test. I replied; "A very humbling experience" and "kinda scary thinking there are folks out there like

me driving around with 80% of the information!" She added; "You think that's scary? Some people miserably fail the test five times and then fluke a pass by accident on their sixth try!"

The driving test was equally interesting. My examiner had just bought the same new car as I had and we spent most of the test time talking about how well they drove on snowy steep mountain roads and how much better they were than our previous vehicles (both pickup trucks). In the end, I don't recall test driving on any major roads with traffic or accessing and egressing the nearby freeway. I certainly completed all the required maneuvers requested of me, however, I couldn't help but wonder whether I was cut a break, now and then, for having such good taste in automobiles!

When I reflected on this experience, I realized it was just like being certified as a challenge course instructor. The eye exam is an example of applicants sharing answers. The written test is evidence of what the lowest possible minimum standard can achieve and how some skills are tested over others. The drive test illustrates the impact of tester favorability and familiarity and again, how certain skills are favored in testing situations. All are indications of how difficult maintaining test quality can be and how easily one can get certified without being prepared. In short, certification testing quality can be poor and minimal, and can exclude soft and meta skills.

Creativity

In Britain, the first country to attempt certifying its outdoor leaders in the 1960s, rigid standards of performance have evolved so that only a few ways of working in the out-

doors are considered acceptable. The result of this has been that British leaders do things predictably and in exactly the same manner. As a result British programs are very safe and when an accident does occur, the government simply legislates the noose tighter to provide fewer options for error.

While this legislation keeps participants safe, it also chokes creativity out of programs. New ways of thinking and doing are prevented along with any possible accidents. Leaders no longer rely on their judgement, they simply follow the rules (for an excellent treatise on the dangers of this, I recommend you read Hunt, 1984). As a result, British programs are very sterile and in many places, programs are still operating the way they did twenty or thirty years ago!

If the profession begins certifying challenge course instructors, then I fear that a single way of doing things will become the norm and the very creativity that gave rise to challenge courses in the first place will be lost as it was lost in Britain (the first challenge courses were designed in Britain in the 1940s, but became a mainstay in America in the 1970s before being widely adopted back to Britain in the 1990s).

Today, challenge course builders around the world, who are just beginning with this type of construction and creating the newest innovations, are leveling criticisms at the American builders for lacking vision and foresight concerning course designs. I fear that these rigorous standards, presently associated with course construction, will also find their way into the instructor camp. I fear that all creativity will be lost in the way we prepare challenge course instructors and the way they do their jobs, if we follow the certification line and adopt creativity choking standards.

University Programs

In America, and now to a greater extent in Australia and New Zealand, university and college degree courses evolved to supply the needs for growing numbers of outdoor leaders. Since students could gather experience over four years of their studies, these courses did a better job of preparing outdoor leaders than any certification scheme could manage in a few days.

So noticeable was this advantage, that the Wilderness Education Association arose to incorporate an outdoor leadership certificate into American universities and colleges. Although this certificate was never widely adopted by more than a handful of institutions, it did make excellent headway in the drive for higher quality leaders. Unfortunately, traditional universities and colleges are conservative and unresponsive bodies that must concern themselves with numbers and the bottom line. As a result, the politics and financial crises of the 1980s tended to close many outdoor leadership courses that were considered to be "on the fringe" of academia. In short, these degrees do provide an excellent entry-level opportunity to aspiring challenge course instructors and outdoor leaders, but the tenuous nature of such courses makes them somewhat limited in their ability to deliver all key pieces of the leadership/instructor puzzle.

Exclusive Club

As a student, I was once denied acceptance to an outdoor leadership graduate degree program in Canada, because I didn't have the necessary certificates to demonstrate my competence. When I offered to demonstrate competence by another means (take a faculty

member climbing or paddling) I was told that this was an inconvenient way to do things and that the degree program had chosen to measure applicants by the number of certificates held.

Most certification schemes have started out as voluntary and become mandatory because they represent an existing system that is easy for governments to adopt or support. Certification can become a "closed shop monopoly" where noncertified experts are excluded. I fear that working on a challenge course will go the way of requiring a certificate, like changing a light bulb requires a union card on some shop floors of manufacturing plants! What does this do to qualified people that refuse to become certified or who can't afford the time or money to get a certificate?

Now some potentially certifiable readers of this chapter will like the idea that they would be more employable than their uncertified job competitors. In response to this excitement, I ask that you see the bigger selfless picture. You may get a job, but the whole profession is diminished by closed shop monopolies that prevent marginalized or disadvantaged folks from a fair chance.

Protection

People are under the mistaken belief that certificates protect organizations or individuals from lawsuits and therefore will reduce insurance premiums. Neither is true. Litigation arises because lawyers like to sue first and settle later. The threat of litigation no longer revolves around whether negligence was the case, but whether you have fully excluded claims for negligence in your legal paperwork. As a result, more of us can expect to defend against such claims and whether we

are guilty or completely without blame, we will still need to face the lawsuit.

In a lawsuit, the instructor's actions will be compared to those of a reasonable and prudent person (usually an expert witness) and holding a certificate will do little to help. In fact, being certified could be worse than not, because lawyers could claim that a certified instructor should be more prudent and reasonable than the average person: you should have known better!

Adventure programs may get a reduction on their insurance premiums for employing certified challenge course instructors, but those premiums are set based on actuarial data from the industry and will be adjusted based on safety records not staffing. The only remaining argument is that a certificate helps maintain safety and again this is a fallacy: safety maintains safety not certificates!

Historical Shifts

Although it remains a controversial issue, certification has ceased to be the trend it was in the 1960s and 70s (Priest, 1987). The debate around certification went something like this. Proponents stated that certification protected the consumer and the environment, motivated leaders to higher standards, and provided some support in cases of liability and lowered insurance premiums (we now know otherwise). Opponents argued that certification was costly and time consuming, was usually a test of specific skill proficiency (omitting soft and meta skills), and was unable to evaluate competencies such as sound judgement (Green, 1982; Rollins, 1983; March, 1987).

Hunt (1985) summed up the key issue in the certification conflict as "the attempt to conflate being safe with being certified"

(p. 24). Rogers (1979) added that outdoor leadership is not a case of certification, but is rather an ongoing process of preparation which takes place over a great deal of time and is never fully completed for the leader who aspires to be truly effective.

For these and other reasons, some of the best certification schemes no longer certify leaders. Britain (the originator of outdoor leadership certification) has chosen to "qualify" its leaders with a descriptive assessment of their strengths and weaknesses instead of an absolute measure. Britain has moved toward a competency assessment framework and Australia is looking to follow this alternative. The United States has chosen program accreditation as the current answer to safety.

Program Accreditation

Practitioners in the field prefer program accreditation to leader certification. Program accreditation has been defined as the recognition that a program or institution had met certain predetermined standards of operation (Gass & Williamson, 1995). In the accreditation process, a program is evaluated "as a whole" in terms of meeting specific standards of operation. With program accreditation, leadership (certified or not) is considered as one piece of the overall pie.

Several years ago, Wade (1983) suggested accreditation as a viable alternative to certification, stating that "such a system of peer reviews has been in operation within the Outward Bound schools" (p. 6) in the United States for almost two decades. Gray (1990) proposed a voluntary peer review process on a regional basis for AEE. It was modelled after an Outward Bound safety review process detailed by Wade and Fischesser

(1988). Reduced insurance premiums for accredited programs was cited as one immediate benefit beyond the expected improvements in educational quality, accident safety, environmental impact, and ethical behaviors. In Virginia, Cockrell and Detzel (1985) obtained 70% support for the idea of accrediting outdoor adventure organizations rather than certifying individual leaders.

With this in mind, five students surveyed the organizational membership of the Association for Experiential Education (AEE is the lead governing body for adventure programming in North America). They found that about two thirds of the respondents favored program accreditation over leadership certification (Bassin, Breault, Fleming, Foell, Neufeld & Priest, 1992). Respondents further preferred a voluntary scheme done by external peer review and applied over local regions.

In short, organizational members of AEE felt program "accreditation was the only viable alternative to [leadership] certification because more professional credibility would be gained and less dependence was needed on the unpredictable human part of the equation" (p. 25).

Program accreditation retains the strengths of leadership certification without being bound by some of its weaknesses. Accreditation provides adventure programs with the ability to achieve standards without losing the flexibility to determine how these standards are met. It allows leaders to deviate from those standards when doing so is clearly in the best interest of a participant's safety, growth, or psychological well being. Accreditation takes a systemic view of the process of adventure programming rather than dividing it into individualized categories like leadership alone. In adventures,

where uncertainty is prevalent, the leaders' best judgment for safely conducting an activity could differ from the standard. In those particular instances, remember that standards are basic guidelines that must be applied to the spirit of the situation, not the mandated letter of practice under all circumstances (Gass & Williamson, 1995).

So Let's Certify Technicians

As the trend of certification slowly died out in the late 1980s, Priest (1988) wrote that:

"a compromise on the most ubiquitous issue of outdoor leadership certification seemed to be quite possible. Most proponents were in favor of certifying some skills deemed important to an outdoor leader and so were many opponents. Most opponents disfavored certifying some of the key attributes of an outdoor leader and so did many proponents. Could the two groups have wanted the same end product, but referred to it in different terms?...A solution to this long standing problem seems possible...let the certificate be one of [technical] skills and not one of outdoor leadership" (pp. 42-43).

Since experts in the field have historically agreed on certifying technicians rather than leaders, I think the time may be right for a certificate of challenge course technology, but nothing more!

CONCLUSION

I have stood against certification, in most of its forms, since 1982 when, as safety committee chair for the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (Canada), I was asked to consider certifying our outdoor leaders. At that time, I wrote that "a certificate can be a false guarantee of good judgement and safe lead-

ership" (March 1987, p. 501). Since then, my antagonism has grown to include:

1. Certification cannot encompass all aspects of leadership competency (ignores many),
2. Testing quality will always be questionably poor due to unavoidable time constraints,
3. Certification mandates a single way of working and thus, it may destroy creativity,
4. Certification is favored by conservative organizations looking for an easy way out,
5. Government agencies move to require certificates and exclude noncertified experts,
6. Certificates offer no more protection than experience and can bring higher liability,
7. Those who have tried certification and failed have found better alternative methods,
8. Accreditation considers leadership (without certificates) as part of the whole system, and
9. People trying to certify challenge course "instructors" probably mean "technicians!"

So for me, this debate depends upon whether we use the term "instructor" to mean "technician" or "facilitator." If we mean technician, then I think it might be possible to certify challenge course technicians. However, if we mean facilitator, then I have great difficulty with anyone saying this is possible, let alone choosing to find his/her market niche by setting up such a certification scheme.